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Dear Colleague,

QUALITY ISSUES IN RECORD KEEPING: RECOMMENDATION FROM THE DENTAL HOSPITAL INQUIRY

Following the recall of 117 dental patients in February 2011 to the regional oral medicine service at the Dental Hospital (Belfast Health and Social Care Trust), an independent inquiry was held into these matters.

The Inquiry team, chaired by Mr Brian Fee QC, published its executive summary in July 2011 (http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/executive_summary_dental_inquiry.pdf)

The Report makes 45 recommendations under seven headings:

- Quality of Care
- Supervision of Appraisal
- Administrative Considerations
- HR/Training/Workload Planning
- Adverse Impacts on Patients
- Communications
- Other Recommendations

The DHSSPS have developed an action plan against the 45 recommendations. The objectives of the Action Plan are to promote patient safety, and enhance both the patient experience and public confidence in the services provided by the Dental Hospital/School of Dentistry. However, many of the actions have wider policy and HSC service impact.

The purpose of this letter is to highlight the 41st recommendation from the Dental Hospital Inquiry Executive Summary which reads:

Dental staff should be reminded of the GDC guidance “Standards for Dental Professionals” which states that dental practitioners must make and keep accurate and complete patient records, including a medical history, at the time they meet patients.

This recommendation has implications for all dental professionals involved in patient care and provides an opportunity to remind all dental professionals of their obligations with regard to record keeping and the importance of keeping good clinical records. I would be grateful if you would share the content of this letter with all members of your dental team.

The General Dental Council (GDC) ‘Standards for Dental Professionals’ states at standard 1.4:

Make and keep accurate and complete patient records, including a medical history, at the time you treat them. Make sure that patients have easy access to their records.

This guidance is available at: [http://www.gdc-uk.org/Newsandpublications/Publications/Publications/StandardsforDentalProfessionals\[1\].pdf](http://www.gdc-uk.org/Newsandpublications/Publications/Publications/StandardsforDentalProfessionals[1].pdf)

The DHSSPSNI ‘Minimum Standards for Dental Care and Treatment (2011)’, apply to all primary care dentistry both health service and private and set out what patients can expect from the dental team who provide care and treatment. These standards are available at available at:

http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/min_stds_dental_candt.pdf . These DHSSPS standards set a number of requirements relating to record keeping, most notably at Standard 10, ‘Confidentiality and information about you’ which states:

The dental service/dental team keeps an accurate, full and up-to-date record of all aspects of your care. It uses and stores it in a manner that ensures your confidentiality, and is in line with current legislation and standards.

I would advise all dental professionals to familiarise themselves with the GDC guidance in relation to record keeping and to make any necessary improvements to their record keeping to ensure compliance with this, and other relevant, guidance. Dental professionals may wish to undertake an audit of their patient records and record management systems to ensure such compliance.

Yours sincerely



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